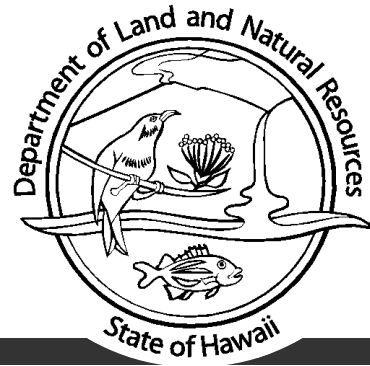


NEWS RELEASE

Contact Kaua'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife, (808) 274-3433
March 22, 2000
00-21



DLNR ANNOUNCES CLOSURE OF PORTIONS OF KOKE'E PARK DUE TO EXTREME FIRE DANGER

Effective March 25, 2000, certain sections of forest and park lands at Koke'e, Kaua'i will be closed due to extremely dry conditions that have created a very high fire hazard. Two recent fires in the area reinforce the need for the closure. No public access will be allowed in these areas until sufficient rainfall occurs and the recovery of vegetation within the area has taken place.

"There is a serious drought condition existing across the state," said Michael Buck, administrator of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife. "We are being hit hard statewide with fires, and the fire season coming early for us. Wildfires can be devastating to our native Hawaiian plant ecosystems. They cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars to suppress, and also put the lives of our forest firefighters at stake."

"We ask for the public's cooperation in complying with, and supporting this protective action. People on all islands who are burning near and around forest and brush areas need to be extra careful as we enter the hot, dry summer months."

Lands being closed to public use and entry are located west of Highway 550 (Koke'e Road) and extend up to the paved Makaha Ridge Road. These include:

- Division of Forestry & Wildlife hunting units A and J and portions of unit H.
- Kekaha Game Management Area
- Portions of the Pu'u Ka Pele Forest Reserve, up to the paved Makaha Ridge Road.
- Portions of the Koke'e and Waimea Canyon State Parks.

In addition, the Kumuwela Ridge area within Kokee State Park will be closed to the public from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. daily.

Public activities in the closed areas include hunting, hiking, gathering, and biking. Forest types range from native forests to plantations of eucalyptus and conifers. The closure does not include leased lots and access roads leading to the leased lots. Leaseholders and their guests may continue using their properties, but not the adjoining park lands within the closed areas.

Park visitors are reminded that fires are permitted only in the Pu'u Ka Pele picnic area and Kanaloahuluhulu Meadow where the fire must be contained in the grills provided in the picnic areas and the campground.

For further information about the Kaua'i area closures, contact the Kaua'i District Office of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife or Division at 274-3433, or the Division of State Parks at 274-3447.

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